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UNCLAS LAGOS 002379

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STATE FOR AF/PD AMIRTHANAYAGAM, AF/W CFULLER, AF/W DEPSTEIN  
ABUJA FOR PAS, POL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OIIP](#) [KPAO](#) [NI](#) [KISL](#)

SUBJECT: Engaging Islam in Southern Nigeria.

Ref: Abuja 001949.

**¶11.** Summary: Working closely with PAS, post engaged the southern Muslim community on the "Shared Meaning of Ramadan and Thanksgiving" and hosted an Iftaar dinner for Muslim community leaders.

**¶12.** The Media Message: During Ramadan, ConGen Lagos reached out to southern Nigeria's Muslim community through both live and taped radio talk shows, distribution of post-produced publications, roundtable discussions with print media and interviews for broadcast news. Post targeted local language media outlets and Muslim-focused broadcast shows, in addition to a nationally syndicated television talk show. To improve its outreach, post utilized high-ranking post staff like the Consul General as well as a Muslim spouse who has lived in America and an officer who used Yoruba to multiply the message.

**¶13.** Post has already seen media coverage of one-half of these engagements and expects the balance to appear by November 28. By that time, post's message will have reached millions of Nigerians, including the large Hausa Muslim community in Lagos, the middle-class Yoruba Muslim community of Lagos and the Yoruba Muslim community in Ibadan that is often seen as the leadership of the southwestern Nigerian Muslims.

**¶14.** Post's message focused on the shared meaning of Ramadan and Thanksgiving. Beyond the coincidence of timing this year, Post highlighted the values of charity, reflection, family and -- ultimately -- celebration that characterize the two holidays. Using this positive message as a springboard, Post staff discussed the practice of Islam in America, particularly the enshrined freedoms of a multicultural group to practice its faith as it wishes. Staff discussed the formal laws that protect freedom of religion in America, as well as the increasing realization that there is a need to better understand Islam through informal channels like President Bush's Iftaar dinners.

**¶15.** Moving to foreign policy, staff stressed that the war on terrorism is not a war on Islam and highlighted President Bush's own statements from September 17, 2001 on the need to disassociate the two ideas. This being Nigeria, inevitably discussions also turned to visas. Staff had the opportunity to clarify many misconceptions about US visa policy. They addressed the fact that visa policies have become stricter across the board since September 11, regardless of religion, but that Muslim applicants are not singled out or refused NIVs based on name, religion, or the number of wives they have. Lastly, staff highlighted the cooperation between Nigeria and the USG to fight terrorism and support an open democracy.

**¶16.** Iftaar Dinner: In addition to the public outreach, the CG hosted the third annual Iftaar dinner on November 12. The Secretary General of the Nigerian Supreme Consul for Islamic

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Affairs observed that each dinner has been better and more relaxed than the last. (Comment: Indeed, the first CG hosted dinners were a bit stilted with invitees wondering about the sincerity of the invitation. However, ongoing contacts with the Islamic community throughout the year has engendered a genuine spirit of shared interests. End comment.)

**¶17.** Comment Continued: After all of the media and Iftaar events, participants expressed a genuine desire for more outreach and more information about one another's policies and practices. Post intends to host many more encounters

with southern Nigeria's Islamic community throughout the year.

HINSON-JONES